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Security Council

Sixty-seventh year

Provisional

6788th meeting
Tuesday, 19 June 2012, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Li Baodong	(China)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Germany	Mr. Berger
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	India	Mr. Ravindra
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Haroon
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	South Africa	Mr. Mashabane
	Togo	Mr. Mbeou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: Last month, we reported that there was a series of quiet and informal meetings between the parties characterized by positive engagement and the constructive handling of several potentially destabilizing events on the ground. At that time, Special Coordinator Robert Serry warned that the situation remained uncertain and fragile, highlighting the need for mutual confidence-building measures in order to sustain the talks. We are worried that that has not happened thus far and that the earlier positive environment brought about by quiet engagement between the parties appears to be challenged. The latest announcements related to settlements are an added setback.

As we speak, there are ongoing intensive efforts to avoid a renewed deadlock. It is in that spirit that Quartet envoys met in Brussels on 15 June. The envoys agreed that there was an urgent need for the parties to continue to pursue the present efforts towards resumed dialogue and substantive negotiations and that it was time for them to take the necessary steps towards that goal.

On 6 June, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced the construction of approximately 850 settlement units in several West Bank settlements. The timing coincided with efforts to reach agreement with settlers to relocate five housing units in the settlement of Beit El. The units were built on private Palestinian land and are due to be relocated no later than 1 July, following an Israeli High Court decision. Let me reiterate that all settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, whether on private land or elsewhere, is in violation of international law and Israel's road map commitments, and it makes the two-State solution all the more difficult to achieve.

On 17 June, near Hebron, an Israeli truck driver allegedly shot and killed two Palestinians after having been attacked himself and injured. Clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians continued in the West Bank during the reporting period. Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the West Bank resulted in three Israelis being injured, including a child.

Settler attacks on Palestinians near Hebron on 5 and 11 June resulted in several students and a farmer being injured. Early this morning, a mosque near Ramallah was spray painted and set on fire. The attack is linked to the Israeli decision to evacuate the Ulpana outpost, adjacent to the settlement of Beit El. We note that the Israeli Government has condemned that desecration and vowed to use all means necessary to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice. The United Nations condemns that flagrant act against a Muslim holy site and calls upon the Israeli Government to protect Palestinian individuals and property.

Additionally, 24 Palestinian structures, including seven residences, were demolished in the West Bank, leading to the displacement of 28 Palestinians, including 14 children. On 12 June, a final demolition order was issued against 51 structures in the village of Susiya, near Hebron, which if implemented could lead to considerable displacement of affected Palestinian inhabitants and result in the destruction of international assistance projects in the village.

Palestinian security forces have continued working to maintain law and order in the West Bank, for which the Palestinian security forces need to be adequately equipped. Palestinian security forces defused a number of unexploded devices and returned to Israel a number of Israeli citizens, including a soldier, who had entered the West Bank. A Palestinian security operation aimed at restoring order in Jenin following the death of its Governor in May was extended to Nablus in early June. Around 50 suspects have been detained. The recent opening of state-of-the-art police training and corrections/rehabilitation facilities in Jericho provides further evidence of Palestinian progress in advancing their governance and rule of law agenda. Support from the international community remains essential if continued progress is to be ensured.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted 189 operations in the occupied West Bank, during which 114

Palestinians were injured, including one child, while 79 Palestinians were arrested, mostly in connection with protests marking the anniversary of the 1967 war. Demonstrations also continued against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273) of the International Court of Justice.

Despite the agreement reached on 14 May that ended the hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody and amid reports that some additional Palestinians have been put in administrative detention, two prisoners are reported not to have ended their hunger strikes. On a positive note, Mahmoud Al-Sarsak, who started his strike on 19 March, ended his hunger strike yesterday, after an agreement was reached for his release to Gaza on 10 July. Family visits from Gaza are scheduled to resume shortly, and, on 31 May, Israel transferred the remains of 91 Palestinian militants to the Palestinian Authority. We continue to call for the agreement to be implemented in full by all sides and for the urgent resolution of the ongoing hunger strikes on humanitarian grounds.

Efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation continued, following the most recent 20 May reconciliation agreement. Fatah and Hamas delegations met in Cairo on 6, 7 and 15 June to discuss candidates for a transitional technocratic Government to be headed by President Abbas. President Abbas insists that any new Government must follow his political programme and abide by Palestinian Liberation Organization commitments. The Palestinian Central Elections Commission resumed operations in Gaza, with full cooperation from the de facto authorities, and plans to register voters in Gaza between 3 and 14 July.

In Gaza, the relative calm that prevailed since April was disrupted on 1 June, when an Islamic Jihad-affiliated militant breached the southern Gaza border and opened fire on a group of Israeli soldiers, killing one before being killed himself. That incident was followed by several exchanges of fire until 6 June. Violence resumed on 17 and 18 June, when rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, while Israeli air strikes resulted in four Palestinian militants killed and several Palestinians injured, including a woman and her child.

Overall, for the reporting period, a total of 15 rockets and 27 mortar shells were fired from Gaza into Israel, while Israel Defense Forces conducted seven incursions and 14 air strikes into Gaza, resulting in 9 Palestinian militants killed, 9 Palestinian militants injured and 15 Palestinian civilians injured. Two Palestinians were also killed in tunnel-related incidents. We continue to condemn all indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel, which must stop. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint.

We are also concerned about serious security incidents over the weekend in the vicinity of the Israeli-Egyptian border. Two rockets were shot from the Sinai into southern Israel on 16 June, one landing in the proximity of the Israeli town of Mitzpe Ramon and the other in the Ovda area, both approximately 30 kilometres from the border. No damage or injuries were reported. In the early morning of 18 June, at least three militants attacked Israeli workers constructing the security fence at the Israeli/Egyptian border near the locality of Kadesh-barnea. One Israeli worker was killed and two were injured. The IDF deployed in the area, exchanged fire with the militants, and two militants were killed.

With the closure entering its sixth year, the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and Gaza's recovery and long-term economic growth remain fundamental objectives of the United Nations. As reported in previous briefings, some significant progress was made towards that goal, but much more needs to be done. For United Nations agencies to continue to play a major role in the international efforts towards that end, further Israeli approvals of outstanding United Nations projects are required. The United Nations continues to urge Israel to allow the unrestricted import of key building materials and particularly aggregate, iron bar and cement, which continue to be illegally imported through tunnels with Egypt.

Gaza continues to face an electricity shortage, and despite the gradual transfer of Qatari-supplied fuel from Egypt, the fuel that is reaching the Gaza power plant cannot produce more than 30 megawatts (MW) of the plant's current 90-MW potential. That, together with a decline in fuel procured from Israeli suppliers, means that the energy situation in Gaza remains bleak. The United Nations will continue to monitor the situation with the aim of helping to restore a sustainable level of energy supply.

Overall, the Palestinian economy is showing signs of slowing. Real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by only 2 per cent in the last quarter of 2011, with GDP growth slightly higher in the West Bank than in the

Gaza Strip. Among the most significant challenges is unemployment, which increased by 3 percentage points in the first quarter of this year. Unemployment is now 24 per cent across the occupied Palestinian territory. Again, it is higher in Gaza than in the West Bank, and young people are particularly affected by the lack of employment opportunities.

Despite those challenges, the Palestinian Authority continues to realize progress in building the institutions of a future Palestinian State, including its ability to collect economic and other data. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics achieved an important milestone when it subscribed to the International Monetary Fund's Special Data Dissemination Standard for the dissemination of economic and financial statistics. That important step should enable better decision-making within both the public and private sectors and, in so doing, should contribute to the pursuit of sound macroeconomic policies by the Palestinian Authority.

Let me briefly turn to the situation in Syria. Achieving a full and sustained cessation of violence and seeking a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Syria remains at the centre of our efforts. General Mood will provide the view from the ground in relation to the activities of the United Nations Supervision Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (UNSMIS) this afternoon.

I will therefore limit my remarks to emphasizing that the Secretary-General remains gravely concerned about the intensification of violence and the rising death toll, as well as the continued human rights abuses and unmet humanitarian needs. The situation in Homs is particularly alarming. The tragic human suffering resulting from the escalating conflict calls for urgent and concerted efforts to avoid a full-scale civil war. Time is running out. The Secretary-General has repeatedly underscored that the Government of Syria bears the prime responsibility for changing course and fully implementing the six-point plan. Shelling and firing against population centres by Government forces, including from tanks and helicopters, must stop immediately. The cessation of armed violence in all its forms is an obligation for all sides. The opposition, too, must abide by it.

Joint Special Envoy Annan and his deputies continue to work with the concerned Governments and a broad spectrum of the Syrian opposition towards launching a political process, which would provide a chance for a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis, which is already in its sixteenth month. We welcome and encourage the ongoing efforts to find common purpose in the international community. It is urgent that those consultations yield real results soon. As was recommended by the Secretary-General and the Joint Special Envoy on 7 June, a truly joint effort by the Council — one that delivers unified and sustained pressure to demand compliance in full with the six-point plan — is urgently needed. Otherwise, we may be reaching the day when it will be too late to stop the crisis from spiralling out of control.

Humanitarian organizations continue to scale up their activities, reaching over 400,000 people in the first 10 days of this month and providing 50,000 people with basic living items this month alone. However, access is still very limited, and the gap between what is needed and what is provided remains far too wide. Due to the increase in fighting, there are now well over one million people in need inside Syria. The number of assisted refugees in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey has reached 86,000 and continues to rise. The Secretary-General calls on the Government of Syria and the opposition groups to facilitate access by humanitarian organizations to all those in need.

In that context, the regional aspects of the peace process are stalled. It is worth noting that the 5 June anniversary passed without incident, both in the occupied Syrian Golan and in southern Lebanon.

Let me now turn to the situation in Lebanon. Since the last briefing (see S/PV.6775), Lebanon has continued to face challenges to its security and stability, owing partly to the continued crisis in Syria.

On 1 June, further fighting broke out in Tripoli between the predominantly Sunni and Alawite neighbourhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen, which continued for several days and left 15 people dead and several dozen injured. The deployment of the Lebanese Army and the Internal Security Forces in the area contained the fighting, but the situation in Tripoli remains fragile. United Nations Special Coordinator Plumbly visited the city on 12 June.

Additionally, there have been reports of Syrian Army incursions into the northern area of Akkar and in the Bekaa, with two persons killed during such incursions. In other incidents, Lebanese citizens were abducted and taken across the border to Syria. Most of them were subsequently released, in some instances in exchange for the release of abducted Lebanese

Alawites. The 11 Lebanese Shia pilgrims kidnapped in Syria have not yet been released; on 9 June a video of them recorded approximately five days earlier was broadcast.

Against that background, President Sleiman succeeded in reconvening the national dialogue on 11 June, after an 18-month gap. The session was attended by many of the country's senior leaders from across the political spectrum, representing both the March 8 and the March 14 political movements. A joint declaration was issued after the meeting that, among other things, effectively commits all of the country's leaders to the policy of disassociation from regional crises. The next dialogue session is scheduled for 25 June and is expected to address the sensitive issue of weapons outside State control.

Calm has prevailed in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations as UNIFIL continued to carry out its operational activities in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Israel Defense Forces completed without incident construction of the wall to replace the existing technical fence in the sensitive area of Kafr Kela. However, air violations by the IDF continued on an almost daily basis. The Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) will be submitted to the Council by the end of the month.

The Secretary-General continues to follow the events in Egypt closely. He looks forward to the early handover of full authority to a civilian Government. He underscores his concern that the country's transition should meet the legitimate aspirations of the Egyptian people and of the international community for the establishment of strong, representative, democratic institutions and for the popular will to be respected, both in the elections and in the drafting of a new Constitution.

Given such dramatic regional developments, progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track is of even greater urgency and would have an important positive impact on the region.

Let me reassure the Council that the Secretary-General, together with our Quartet partners, will continue to stress the necessity of renewing dialogue and making real progress towards the two-State solution, which is long overdue and, as the Special Coordinator warned in his briefing last month, increasingly at risk. We thus strongly encourage them to urgently consider taking the necessary constructive steps that would allow them to renew the meetings between their negotiators and work towards resumed direct negotiations. Goodwill gestures will go a long way towards removing the lack of trust. Only a direct and meaningful dialogue can help restore the belief in a negotiated peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.